

I oppose the current level of permissiveness in concentrating ownership of the media, and I am most emphatically opposed to allowing any extension to permit ownership of radio, television, and newspapers in the same markets. Our country recognized the evil of monopoly over 100 years ago and put laws and regulations in place to end them. Now we have entities that would like to create monopolies that would infringe on the most valuable right that we have, the right of free speech. These monopolies will be created with the main purpose of profit, but they will have the incidental result of stifling the free flow of information.

The right of free speech without the right to have a full access to the means of broadcasting free speech is an empty right. Our citizens have the right to speak the truth and express their opinions, but they also have the right to hear the truth and to hear the opinions of others. If we allow a monopolization of the sources of local public information, we open the door to the worst sort of local tyranny.

There is a reason that undemocratic nations control their media, it is to control what their citizens know and what they believe. A monopolized local media market opens the door to the manipulation of local politics and a control of local economic activity.

In my community, many of us fought hard to send a criminal congressman, James Traficant, to prison. At the same time, our local radio monopoly, Clear Channel Communications, placed the same man on the air as their guest radio host. If the Clear Channel station had just been one of many voices on the air this would have been a good example of free speech, (although they admitted they did it just for the ratings). Ten years ago, there would have been a number of competing radio stations in Youngstown that would have broadcast opposing views and perhaps criticism of the judgment involved in giving a criminal defendant the opportunity to influence the potential jury. Unfortunately, because of the liberality permitted for media monopolies to acquire unlimited numbers of local stations, those former competing radio stations are now all owned by Clear Channel. Our local market no longer has independent voices who can run opposing views. Clear Channel owns our radio market. We will listen to what they want us to listen to.

In this situation, our television stations gave opposing views, our newspaper ran editorials criticizing the public forum given a person who had completely betrayed the public trust. What voice will be raised in the future if one business organization owns all of the media outlets? There will be no voice but one. That possible future is not one with which we should experiment. I urge you to refuse any further liberalization of the consolidation of media ownership.